

GENOCIDE IN AUSTRALIA: The Undeclared War Never Ended

In 1948 the United Nations adopted the Convention on Genocide. Article I states:

“The contracting parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in times of peace or in times of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.”

Australia was a contracting party to the Convention on Genocide. At the United Nations General Assembly meeting in Paris, 1948, Sir Robert Menzies stated:

“...the last thing I should dream of doing would be to speak or vote in such a way as to cast any doubt on the proposition that in Australia we abominate the crime of Genocide. No one has ever doubted it. If it needs our subscription to a convention to advertise our feelings to the world, then let us subscribe to it.”

The 1946 United Nations resolution on genocide states:

“Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the rights to live of individual human beings; such a denial of the right of existence shocks the conscience of mankind, results in great losses to humanity in the form of cultural and other contributions represented by these human groups, and is contrary to moral law and to the spirit and aims of the United Nations.”

Article II of the 1948 Convention on Genocide states:

“...genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

END THE GENOCIDE

Australia has twice been condemned by the UN for its treatment of Indigenous people. Many Australians consider genocide to be an historical occurrence. When they think about contemporary genocide, they think about atrocities in places like Kosovo or Rwanda. They often assume that genocide in Australia is a thing of the past, with no impact on the present or future. The Black GST asserts that genocide is a contemporary reality in this country. The Black GST asserts that Indigenous people in this country are subject to a regime of systematic and pre-meditated denial of the human rights afforded to every other group. The Black GST affirms that the Australian government continues to perpetuate acts that breach the United Nations Convention on Genocide (1948):

a) Killing members of the group:

The Black GST considers Indigenous deaths in custody to constitute a genocidal act. Indigenous Australians are 15 times more likely to die from assault than non-Indigenous Australians. This is a direct result of the ongoing genocidal policies perpetrated by the Australian government. Indigenous people were 16.5 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to die in custody between 1990 and 1995 – and the rate is rising. This is due to the disproportionately high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody. In South Australia Indigenous people were 31.7 times more likely to die in custody than non-Indigenous Australians. The national rate of death for Indigenous women in custody was even higher than the corresponding rate for Indigenous men. The average age of Aboriginal people who died in custody is 29.2 years. The rate for Indigenous adults incarcerated is 15 times more than non-Indigenous adults.

The Black GST calls for Indigenous sovereignty to be recognized. Under Indigenous sovereignty the genocidal policies that result in these disproportionately high death rates would be unlawful according to traditional law.

b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group:

The Black GST asserts that Indigenous people continue to suffer under genocidal policies, which directly cause serious bodily and mental harm – which violates the UN Convention on Genocide (1948.) Indigenous people were almost one-and-a-half times more likely than non-Indigenous people to report experiencing at least one stressor (83% compared with 57%). The psychological stress Indigenous people suffer as a result of genocide contributes to significantly higher rates of mental illness, self-harm and suicide. In a 2002 report 82% of Indigenous people stated they had experienced significant psychological stress in the last 12 months. The most common stressors were the death of a relative or close friend (46%), serious illness or disability (31%) and unemployment (27%). Indigenous people in isolated communities were more likely to be affected by poverty and lack of access to health services, and reported that their living conditions, especially overcrowding (42%) and alcohol and drug-related problems (37%) caused psychological stress.

Indigenous sovereignty enshrines respect for individuals, families and communities and would ensure that the genocidal practices contributing to the serious bodily and mental harm Indigenous people suffer are genuinely addressed and alleviated.

c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

The Black GST believe that Indigenous people suffer under conditions of life which result in the continuation of genocide. Life expectancy for Indigenous adults is significantly lower than non-Indigenous adults: 19 years for males and 21 years for females, which is lower than any developed nation on earth. This is caused by genocidal factors such as poverty, institutionalised racism and systemic state violence.

Recognition of Indigenous sovereignty would see Indigenous cultures, ways of life and people respected. As a result of improved access to health services, life expectancy for Indigenous people would increase.

d) Imposing measures intending to prevent births within the groups;

The Black GST accuses the government of creating genocidal conditions of life which directly result in an infant mortality rate that is twice that of non-Indigenous infants.

The Black GST demands that Indigenous sovereignty be recognised so that the genocidal conditions which are in clear violation of the UN Convention on Genocide (1948) can be acknowledged and reversed.

e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The Black GST acknowledges that the practice of stealing and institutionalising children with the intention of assimilating them constitutes genocide. 38% of Indigenous people over 15 years have been removed or had a relative removed from their natural family. Young Indigenous people continue to be removed from their families, with Indigenous people under the age of 18 are 20 times more likely to be detained by the juvenile justice system than non-Indigenous young people. In 2003, there were 302 Indigenous people under 18 in juvenile facilities nationally, compared with 338 non-Indigenous. Indigenous people under the age of 18 are 21 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous people are.

Recognition of Indigenous sovereignty would be the first step in addressing the grief and pain Indigenous people suffer as a result of the genocidal policy of removing children. Recognition of Indigenous sovereignty would begin to re-establish family and community bonds, which the genocidal practices Indigenous people suffered under sought to sever.

For more information, visit the Black GST website at: <http://www.blackgst.com> or email us at blackgst@hotmail.com

Reference: http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/statistics